

2019

Strong Men & Women in Virginia History

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People of African descent have been a part of Virginia's—and America's—story since European colonization of the North American continent began. Yet the contributions of African Americans often have been ignored, obscured, or underappreciated by those who recorded history. In observance of Black History Month, Dominion Energy and the Library of Virginia honor seven distinguished Virginians, past and present, as ***Strong Men & Women in Virginia History*** for their important contributions to the state, the nation, or their professions.

These men and women offer powerful examples of individuals who refused to be defined by their circumstances. Their biographies are a testament to the determination and perseverance displayed by extraordinary people during challenging times. These individuals demonstrate how African Americans have actively campaigned through education and advocacy for better lives for themselves, their people, and all Americans. It is these many contributions that the ***Strong Men & Women in Virginia History*** program seeks to recognize and share.

To learn more about these remarkable men and women, all of whom have used their talents and creativity to push for equality and inclusion in American society, visit our website at www.lva.virginia.gov/smw.

Lawrence A. Davies

1930– | **Fredericksburg**
MINISTER AND CIVIC LEADER

Born in Houston, Texas, Lawrence Anderson Davies grew up intending to study medicine and graduated with a biology degree from Prairie View A&M University in 1949. Army service inspired him to take up the ministry and upon his discharge he joined Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. Davies later received a divinity degree from Howard University and a master's degree in sacred theology from Wesley Theological Seminary. Ordained in 1956, he first served at Washington's Good Samaritan Church. In 1962 he became pastor at Shiloh Baptist Church (Old Site) in Fredericksburg.

Davies became involved in Fredericksburg community affairs and sparked the creation of Citizens United for Action to combat racial discrimination in the city. In 1966 he became the first African American elected to Fredericksburg's city council, and after serving for a decade, he was elected the city's first African-American mayor. He continued to win reelection as mayor until retiring in 1996. Davies was instrumental in Fredericksburg's growth, helping spur the creation of low-income housing and encouraging the establishment of an affordable bus system. He has been an advocate for increased access to mental health treatment, supported a community wellness coalition, and in the 1990s helped ensure that a new hospital was built in the city limits. After 50 years as pastor of Shiloh (Old Site), Davies retired from the pulpit in 2012, but has continued his community activism. In 2016 he was honored by Leadership Fredericksburg for his integrity and vision.

Nominated by William Bailey, Pamela Bridgewater, and Xavier Richardson, Fredericksburg.

Fannie W. Fitzgerald

1930–2016 | **Prince William County**
EDUCATOR AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SUPERVISOR

Fannie Beatrice Wilkinson Fitzgerald (July 27, 1930–April 7, 2016) grew up in Amelia County, the youngest of 11 children. Her parents stressed the importance of both religion and education, laying a strong foundation on which Fitzgerald built an inspiring 35-year career. She earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education from Virginia Union University in 1953 and began teaching in a sparsely resourced, two-room schoolhouse. After a few years, she applied to graduate programs in Virginia, but was barred from entry because she was African American. Undeterred, she studied at Columbia University, in New York, receiving her master's degree in special education in 1960. During this time, she also taught at two segregated schools in Prince William County.

Although the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawed segregated schooling in 1954, many Virginia politicians pushed back against the decision with a program of Massive Resistance that led to school closings in some jurisdictions. Amid this volatile context, Fitzgerald and three other African-American teachers, known as the "Courageous Four," were selected in 1965 to pioneer desegregation in Prince William. They were transferred from all-black schools to teach at white schools and thus helped accomplish the school system's complete desegregation by September 1966. When asked about this time, Fitzgerald replied, "Children are children. It doesn't matter what color they are." In addition to serving as a fourth-grade teacher and a learning disabilities specialist, she was also a supervisor for both integration and special needs programs. In 2008 a Dale City elementary school was named in her honor.

Gladys B. West

1930– | **King George County**
MATHEMATICIAN AND TECHNOLOGY PIONEER

Born in rural Dinwiddie County, Gladys Mae Brown West graduated first in her high school class, earning her a scholarship to Virginia State College (later Virginia State University), where she earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics in 1952. After teaching in public schools, she completed a master's degree from Virginia State in 1955, and the following year began working at the Naval Surface Warfare Center at Dahlgren. She was the second African-American woman hired at the base, among only four African-American employees in total. Admired by her colleagues for her skill in calculating complex mathematical equations, she excelled in programming for computers. West emerged as an integral part of the team that developed the modern Global Positioning System, tirelessly collecting data from orbiting satellites and developing mathematical algorithms for supercomputers to process precise surface elevations. She later became project manager for the radar altimetry data processing project of Seasat, the first satellite designed for remote sensing of the Earth's oceans, for which she received a commendation. West published numerous papers and made presentations on her work at national and international conferences before retiring in 1998.

Throughout her career West continued her education and in 2000 received a PhD in public administration and policy affairs from Virginia Tech. In 2018 the British Broadcasting Corporation named her to its 100 Women program, which annually honors influential women from around the world. That same year the General Assembly of Virginia passed a joint resolution honoring West for her pioneering career and contributions to technological development.

William T. Stone

1931–2018 | **Williamsburg**
JUDGE AND CIVIC LEADER

Born in Washington, D.C., William T. Stone grew up in the vicinity of Williamsburg, where he attended the local segregated schools and worked in his family's funeral home. In 1953 he graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration and economics from Central State College in Wilberforce, Ohio. Afterward he served in the army as a military policeman and trained as an embalmer. Encouraged in his youth to pursue a legal career by a dean at the College of William and Mary's law school, Stone studied law at American University and earned his degree in 1962. He established a private practice in Newport News, but soon returned to Williamsburg, where he opened a firm that later became the city's first integrated law office. Although he did not take on civil rights cases, he was a local advocate for the rights of African Americans and women.

In April 1968, Stone was the first African American appointed a substitute judge for James City County and the city of Williamsburg, making him one of the earliest African American judges in Virginia. He presided over cases in the general district court and the juvenile and domestic relations court. While sitting on the bench he continued to practice law and to operate the family's funeral home, becoming a mentor for African Americans in both fields. He resigned as a judge in 1998 and retired from practicing law the following year. At a public event in 2000, Williamsburg residents honored Stone for his many accomplishments. In commemoration of his legacy and commitment to the community, a major thoroughfare in Williamsburg has been dedicated in his honor.

Nominated by Melanie Rapp Beale, Yorktown.

Andrew J. White Sr.

1932– | **Petersburg**
MINISTER AND COMMUNITY ACTIVIST

Andrew Jackson White Sr. was born in rural King and Queen County and attended local segregated schools. In 1953 he received a bachelor's degree at Virginia Union University in Richmond, and went on to earn divinity degrees from Virginia Union's School of Theology. White taught history and social studies in Westmoreland County.

Ordained a Baptist minister in 1953, he served a Northumberland County church before becoming pastor of Petersburg's Zion Baptist Church in 1963. In 1969 White helped found the interracial Downtown Churches United, which worked with other community groups to provide food, clothing, shelter, and job assistance. White fought for adoption of the federal food stamp program for low-income families, which the city council approved in 1970. Concerned about access to health care, he sat on the board of the Southside Mental Health Association, serving as its first African-American president, and was a member of the Petersburg Hospital Authority, which oversaw the construction of a new facility. He was secretary of the board of trustees for the Virginia Negro Baptist Children's Home and a vice president of the Dinwiddie County-based Titmus Foundation, supporting educational and religious organizations. He co-chaired the successful capital campaign to construct a new public library in Petersburg that opened in 2014.

White retired as Zion's pastor in 2011. He served concurrently as pastor of Union Branch Baptist Church in nearby Prince George County, and in 2015 the church dedicated a community center named for him.

Nominated by Ann C. Taylor, Petersburg.

Deanna Reed

1966– | **Harrisonburg**
MAYOR AND MENTOR

Growing up in Harrisonburg, Deanna Reed was surrounded by women whose examples of community service inspired her to mentor young women of color. When she returned to the city to care for her aging grandmother, Reed worked in the public schools and became involved in several community organizations, including the African-American Culture Festival and the Harrisonburg Women's Service League, of which she has served as president. For more than thirty years she has also been a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. In 2009 Reed co-founded Precious Gems Academy, an after-school mentorship program for students from elementary to high school. In 2015 she became program director for the On the Road Collaborative, a local initiative that connects low-income youth with academic support, career enrichment classes, and leadership development to prepare middle- and high-school students for life after graduation.

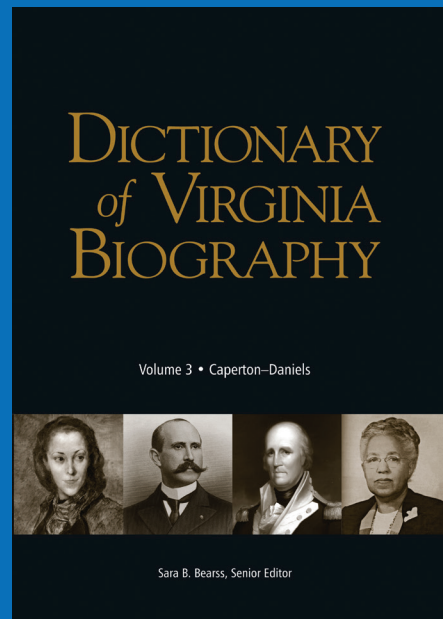
Concerned about school overcrowding, Reed began attending city council meetings and was struck by the fact that there were no female members at the time. After unsuccessfully attempting to recruit a woman to run, she decided to run for office herself, winning election in 2016 with the most votes in the council's history. The first African-American woman elected to Harrisonburg's city council, she was also the first to be chosen mayor by the council. As mayor, Reed focuses on education and strives to bring together Harrisonburg's diverse communities. In 2018 *Essence* named her to its list of Woke 100 Women, which highlights African-American change agents.

Kwame Alexander

1968– | **Fairfax County**
WRITER AND YOUTH ADVOCATE

A poet, publisher, playwright, producer, speaker, and performer, Kwame Alexander is an energetic and enthusiastic advocate for literacy and literature throughout the world. He performs his cutting-edge brand of poetry for audiences worldwide, as well as conducting writing and publishing workshops. Alexander has received multiple awards, including the inaugural Pat Conroy Legacy Award in 2018. In 2015 he won the John Newbery Medal for *The Crossover* (2014), a novel in verse about 12-year-old basketball-playing twins, which was also honored as an NCTE Charlotte Huck Honor Book and with the Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Prize. In 2018 Alexander established Versify, an imprint of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books for Young Readers, to publish unconventional works in children's literature. Alexander is the author of *Swing* (2018), *Rebound* (2018), a companion to *The Crossover*, and more than 20 other titles.

Born in New York City, Alexander grew up in Chesapeake, Virginia, surrounded by books. His father was a scholar and book publisher and his mother was an educator. At Virginia Tech Alexander began premedical studies until he took a writing class with award-winning poet Nikki Giovanni. In addition to writing poetry, he wanted to publish work by African-American authors and operated his own book publishing company for a decade. For several years he produced an annual book festival to reach a diverse audience of writers and readers. Eager to promote poetry and literature among students, Alexander has also served as a poet-in-residence at schools in Northern Virginia, where he now lives.



Learn more about distinguished African Americans from Virginia in the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography* (Richmond: Library of Virginia, 1998–2006) and on the Library of Virginia's websites, www.lva.virginia.gov and www.virginiamemory.com. Instructional materials, classroom activities, and 2020 nomination forms are available at www.lva.virginia.gov/smw.

A joint project of Dominion Energy and the Library of Virginia.



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

800 East Broad Street • Richmond VA 23219
www.lva.virginia.gov

Lawrence A. Davies

**1930–
Fredericksburg**
**MINISTER AND
CIVIC LEADER**

The first African American elected mayor of Fredericksburg, Reverend Lawrence A. Davies has devoted his life to serving his community.

*Nominated by
William Bailey,
Pamela Bridgewater,
and Xavier Richardson,
Fredericksburg.*



Fannie W. Fitzgerald

**1930–2016
Prince William
County**
**EDUCATOR AND
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SUPERVISOR**

Fannie W. Fitzgerald pioneered the integration of Prince William County Schools amid her 35-year career as an educator in Virginia schools.



Gladys B. West

**1930–
King George
County**
**MATHEMATICIAN AND
TECHNOLOGY PIONEER**

A pioneer in mathematics, Gladys B. West was an instrumental hidden figure in the development of the modern Global Positioning System.

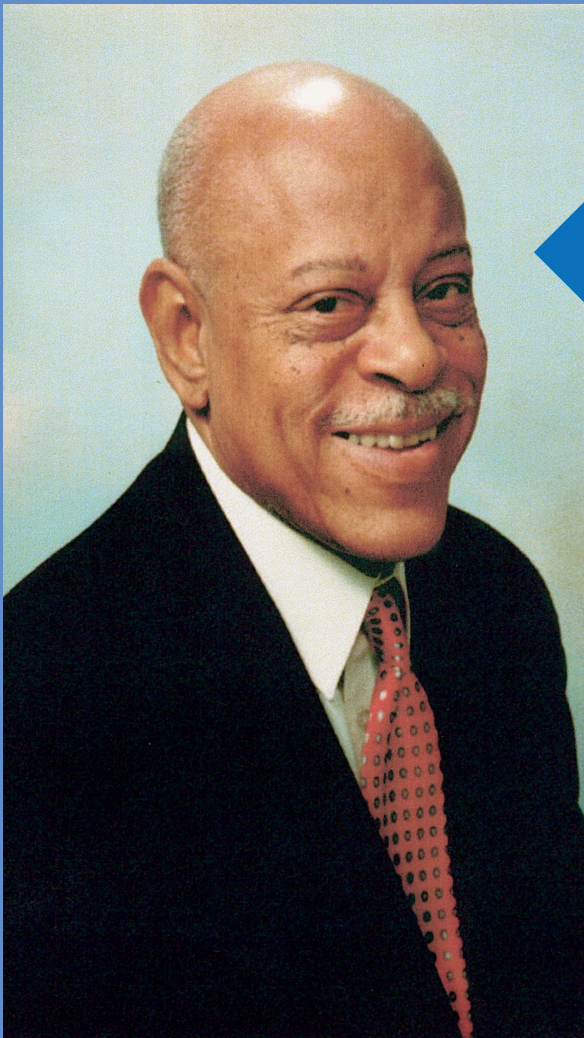


William T. Stone

**1931–2018
Williamsburg**
**JUDGE AND
CIVIC LEADER**

A revered civic leader and successful businessman, William T. Stone was the first African-American judge in Williamsburg.

*Nominated by Melanie
Rapp Beale, Yorktown.*

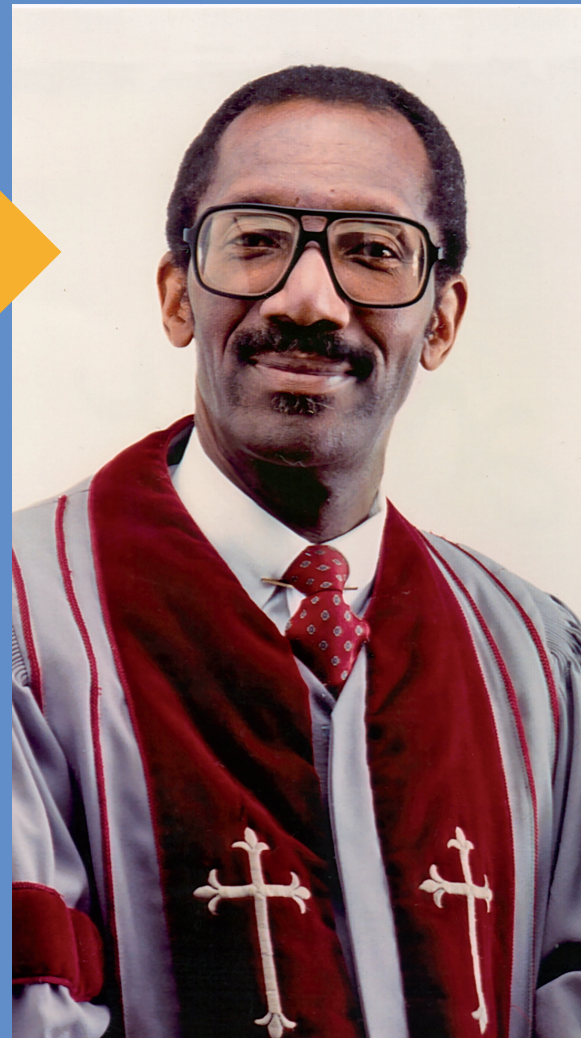


Andrew J. White Sr.

**1932–
Petersburg**
**MINISTER AND
COMMUNITY ACTIVIST**

Throughout his career as a Baptist minister, Reverend Andrew J. White Sr. has championed education, health care, and community service.

*Nominated by Ann C.
Taylor, Petersburg.*



Deanna Reed

**1966–
Harrisonburg**
MAYOR AND MENTOR

The first African-American woman to serve as mayor of Harrisonburg, Deanna Reed also mentors community youth through leadership programs she has established.



Kwame Alexander

**1968–
Fairfax County**
**WRITER AND
YOUTH ADVOCATE**

Kwame Alexander believes in the power of poetry to engage young readers in language and literature.



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